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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 001187

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM IV

SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: OPA IMPLEMENTATION AT CRITICAL STAGE

REF: ABIDJAN 1080

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SILVIA EIRIZ FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Modalities to carry out the identification process were the main subject of the November 18-22 meeting of the OPA Evaluation and Monitoring Committee (CEA). The parties' positions were so irreconcilable that Interior Minister Tagro reportedly abandoned the meeting along with his delegation. President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Soro met OPA Facilitator and Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaore in Ouagadougou on November 27, but seem to have failed to make progress on identification. OPA implementation has now reached the key issue of identification, which is at the heart of the country's political crisis. The parties' ability to clear this hurdle will be critical to a successful continuation of the OPA. A Presidential election in 2008 now looks likely. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Modalities to carry out the identification process were the subject of discussion at the November 18-22 meeting of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement (OPA) Evaluation and Monitoring Committee. Mayor of the Abidjan Abobo borough Adama Toungara, close advisor to Rally of Republicans (Rassemblement des Republicains - RDR) leader Alassane Ouattara, told Pol/Econ Chief November 21 that under discussion at that meeting was the role to be played by the Societe d'Applications Generales Electriques et Mecaniques (SAGEM), the French technical operator designated to produce the national identity cards. Minister of Interior and member of the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) ruling party Desire Tagro wanted SAGEM to be under the oversight of the National Institute of Statistics (Institut National de la Statistique - INS). The Prime Minister's camp reportedly refused to agree. The opposition parties view INS Director General Mathieu Melleu, who was appointed by President Gbagbo in 2002, as a partisan FPI supporter. Melleu told Poloff October 23 that opposition party estimates of 3 million Ivorians who need to appear before the mobile courts issuing documentation to those whose births were never registered (audiences foraines) are widely exaggerated and implied that the inflated numbers are meant to swell the voter rolls with foreigners.

¶3. (C) Toungara told Pol/Econ Chief that during the meeting of the CEA, Soro sent a message to Gbagbo asking if Tagro was speaking on his behalf regarding the relationship between INS and SAGEM and telling him that if that were the case, Soro would return to his northern stronghold of Bouake. According to Toungara, Gbagbo responded that he did not support Tagro's proposition. Toungara noted that the tension between the parties during the CEA meeting was so high that the Facilitator at one point kept them in separate rooms and shuttled back and forth between them.

¶4. (C) Toungara said that also under discussion at the

November 18-22 meeting in Ouagadougou was the practice by audiences foraines judges of writing "said to be" of Ivorian nationality regarding the nationality of the applicant's parents. Such statements will raise questions when the recipient of the birth certification presents that document to register to vote and to obtain the national identity card.

¶ 15. (SBU) President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Soro met OPA Facilitator and Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaore in Ouagadougou on November 27. No communique has been issued but there are widespread reports that Gbagbo and Soro agreed to hold elections by June 2008. We have seen no reports or indication that progress was made on the issue of identification. Gbagbo returned to Cote d'Ivoire to begin a visit to the north to demonstrate the renewed unity of the country. He will visit Korhogo and Ferkessedougou, Soro's hometown, on November 28 and Boundiali and Tingrela on November 29.

¶ 16. (C) Comment. OPA implementation, which is approximately 6 months behind schedule, has now reached the key and thorny issue of identification. Identification and nationality are at the heart of the country's political crisis. Soro needs to deliver on these issues to his northern constituency since treatment of northerners as second class citizens is a key reason the Forces Nouvelles took up arms in 2002 and has been a sustaining ideal throughout the five-year-long division of the country. The audiences foraines proceedings fell apart in 2006 during the tenure of Soro's predecessor, Charles Konan Banny, due to FPI opposition to the process and harassment and intimidation of applicants by FPI supporters. Each of Cote d'Ivoire's previous peace agreements has floundered over the identification question. For the OPA not to join the stack of failed peace agreements, Gbagbo and Soro

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need to tackle the issue forthrightly and find a compromise solution. Whether they can do that remains to be seen. While the identification process agreed upon may not be perfect, it has to be complete and transparent enough to reassure northerners. Failure to come to agreement on identification could foretell the demise of the OPA. End Comment.

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